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Provisions for Togetherness: A Community Cafe in Downtown Knoxville

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provisions for togetherness:

a community cafe in downtown knoxville






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Historically, Knoxville has been a fragmented city, divided into very separate neighborhoods stretching to the north, east, south, and west. Certain geographical barriers, such as the river and the railroad tracks, have prevented the sub-communities within Knoxville from coming together and finding unity, but most of the separation is deeply rooted in the history of the region and the ways with which conflict has been dealt. The fragmentation of the community has caused some sub-populations and areas of the city to become forgotten and to feel isolated and powerless against the majority.

The path to seeking unity and a sense of togetherness in the Knoxville community must start by breaking social barriers and creating common ground on which all community members can stand. A commonality between the neighborhoods and populations within Knoxville is the significance of food. Food is a basic provision needed to sustain life and yet the act of sharing a meal connects people in ways that allows them to feel as if they are doing much more than simply surviving. Food is a resource that all people need but not all community members have access to fresh food. The concept of a community café is to feed all people, regardless of their ability to pay for it. People can volunteer their time in exchange for a meal and prices are suggested so that patrons have the option to donate more than what is asked.

The design of *Provisions Community Café* explores the ways in which an interior space can unify a community by drawing people in, breaking social routines, and creating an atmosphere where conversation can happen naturally and without social stigma. *Provisions* seeks to do much more than feed the people of Knoxville; it seeks to feed the spirit of the city and to bring people together over a meal to create a sense of community that transcends historical cynicism and social hesitations.

1787	Knoxville was founded		
1863	Battle of Fort Sanders	[a] 	1861-65 American Civil War: East Tennessee stays part of the Union while the rest of the state succeeds.
1890	The first electric streetcar is introduced, leading to the development of "streetcar suburbs" sprawling from downtown.	[b] 	Post-Civil War Influx of northern business people. Almost 100 factories open in Knoxville. In-migration into the city from backcountry.
1917	South Knoxville annexed.		1897 West Knoxville and North Knoxville are annexed.
1929	The Great Depression hits. Blacks are fired and their jobs are given to the unemployed whites causing many blacks to leave the city.	[c] 	1919 Race riots take place in "The Bowery" neighborhood (modern day Old City). Knoxville had previously been perceived as a racially tolerant city.
1954-56	Major textile mills in Knoxville (Cherokee Mills, Venus Hosiery, Brookside Mills) shut down.	[d] 	1941 Cas Walker is elected mayor and becomes a hero to the working class and the poor. While in office, Walker opposed any new and progressive ideas for the city such as fluoridation of water or adding parking meters downtown.
1950s-70s	Urban Renewal projects result in the demolition of many black-owned business, homes, and churches. The new highway connections separated East Knoxville from the rest of the city.	[e] 	1960 Various sit-ins and civil rights protests occur in the city.
1972	West Town Mall opens, making trips downtown less frequent for many West Knoxville residents.		2000 Citizens' meetings are held throughout the city to create a vision for Knoxville. These meetings are the first step toward an attitude of urban citizenship.



[f]

neighborhood area map

Elements such as the river and highways perpetuate the separation between neighborhood communities in Knoxville.



[h]



[g]

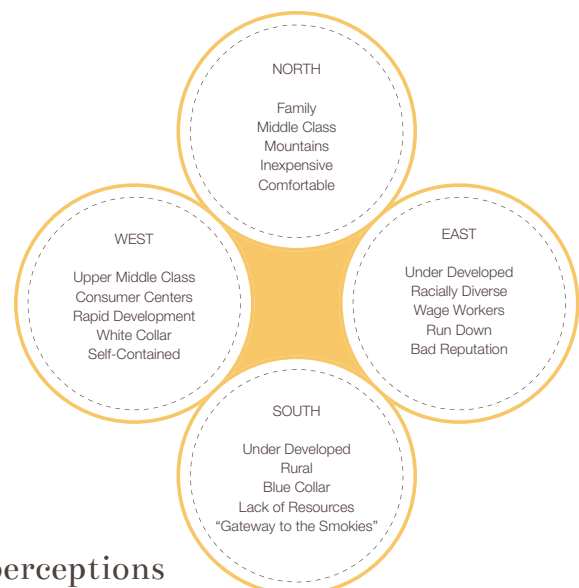


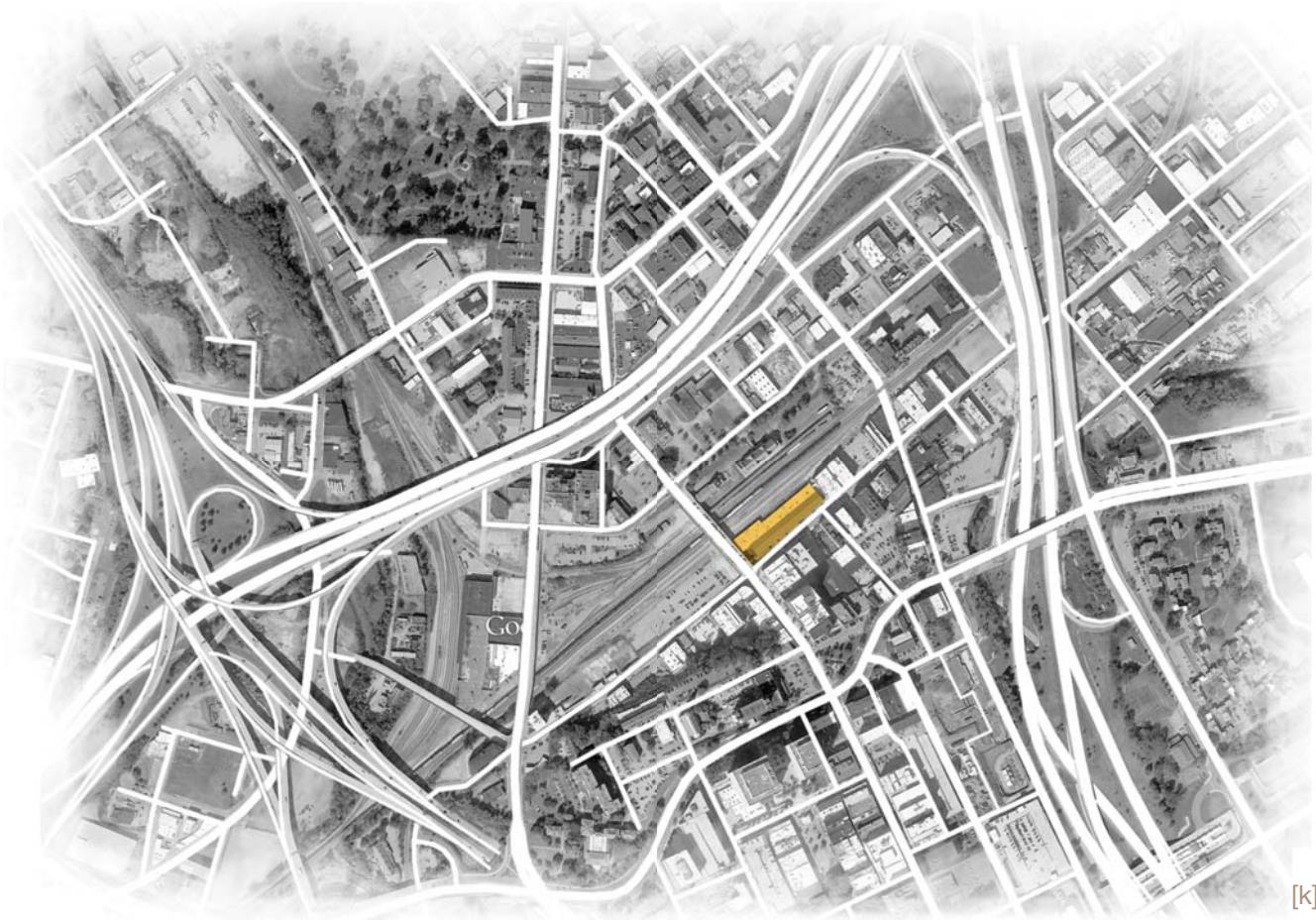
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neighborhood perceptions





[k]

jackson terminal

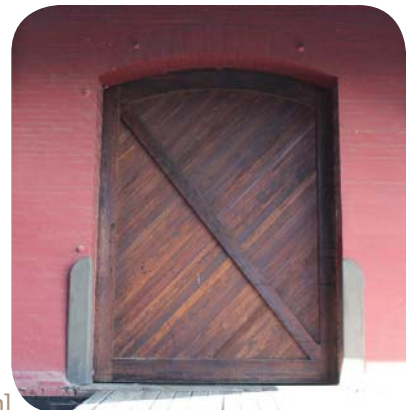
Jackson Terminal is currently being renovated and will reopen as retail and restaurant spaces. The terminal is located in the Old City and is just down the road from various homeless shelters. Historically, Jackson Terminal was used as a railroad freight depot and, more recently, as a storage warehouse for Heuristics Workshop.



[l]

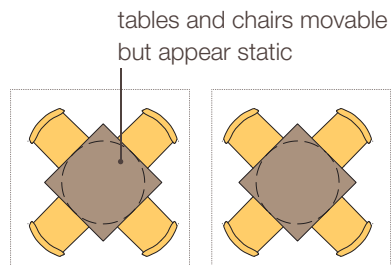
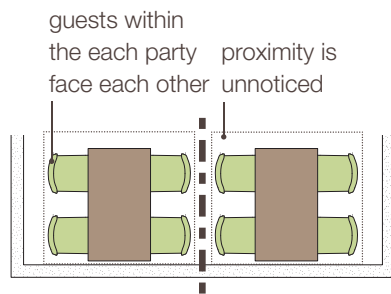
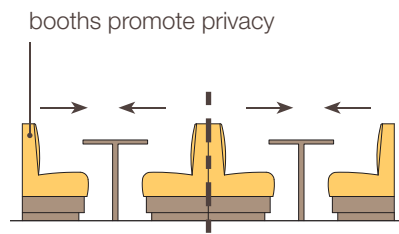


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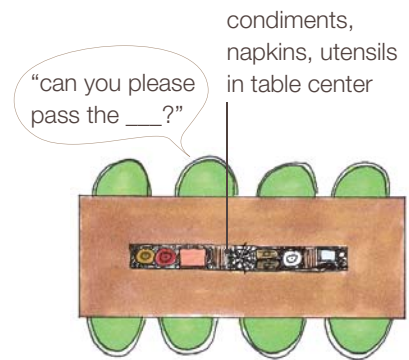
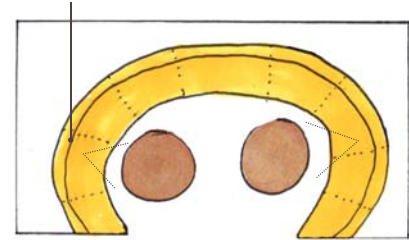
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typical layouts

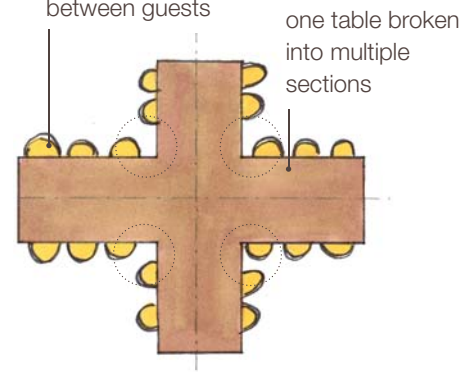


new ideas

a community booth offers a more informal setting for people to stay longer and converse

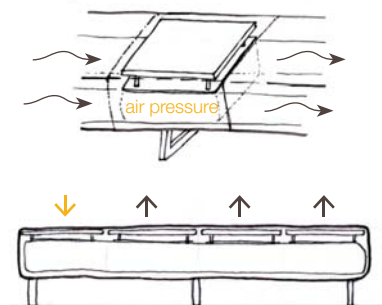


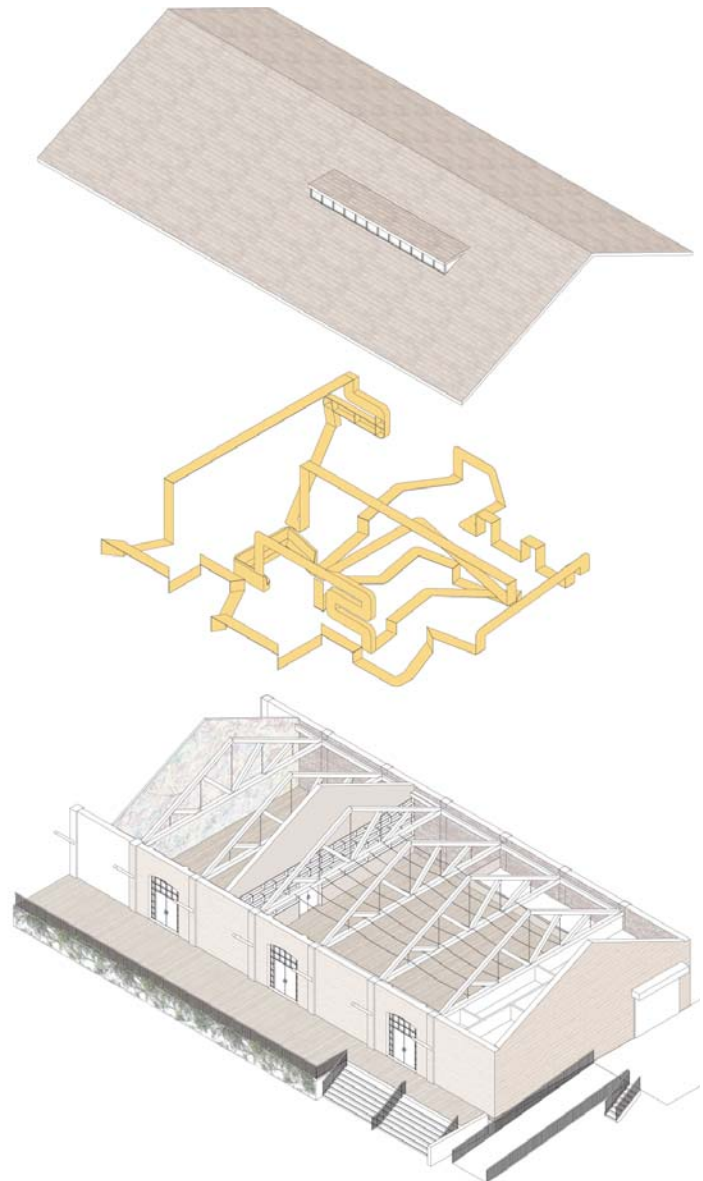
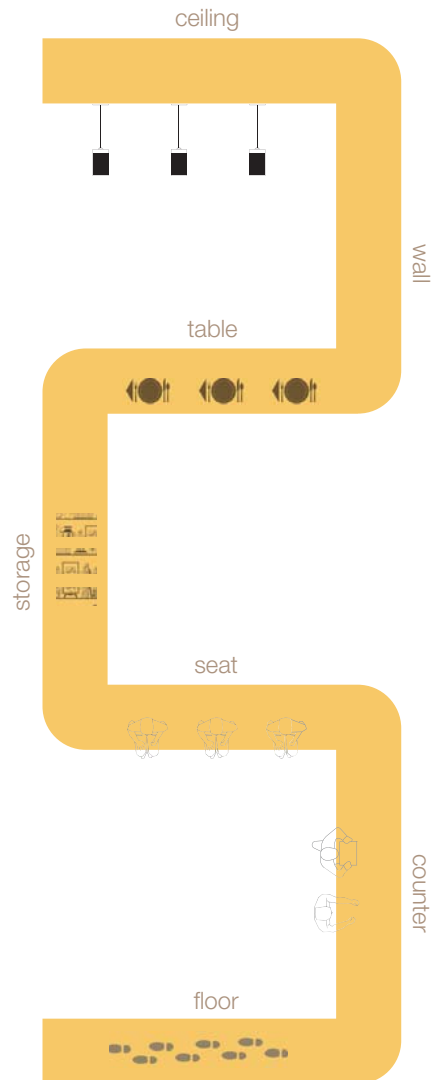
corners create moments of interaction between guests



restaurant reinterpretations

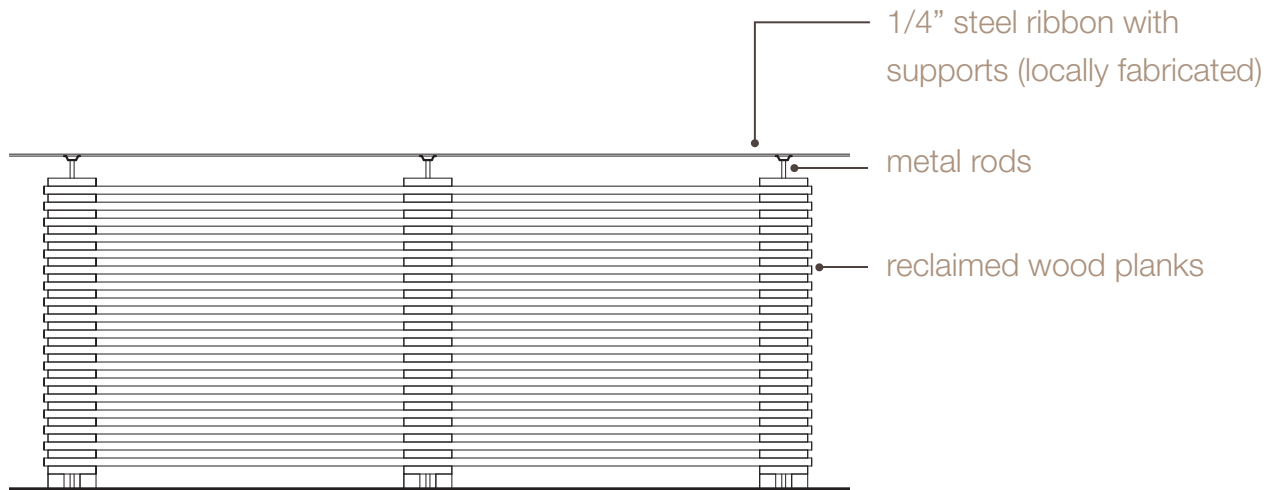
In order to get people out of their areas of comfort, the routine of the restaurant must be broken. Typical dining layouts are reinterpreted in order to promote unity with all guests and to create moments where conversations can happen between groups.





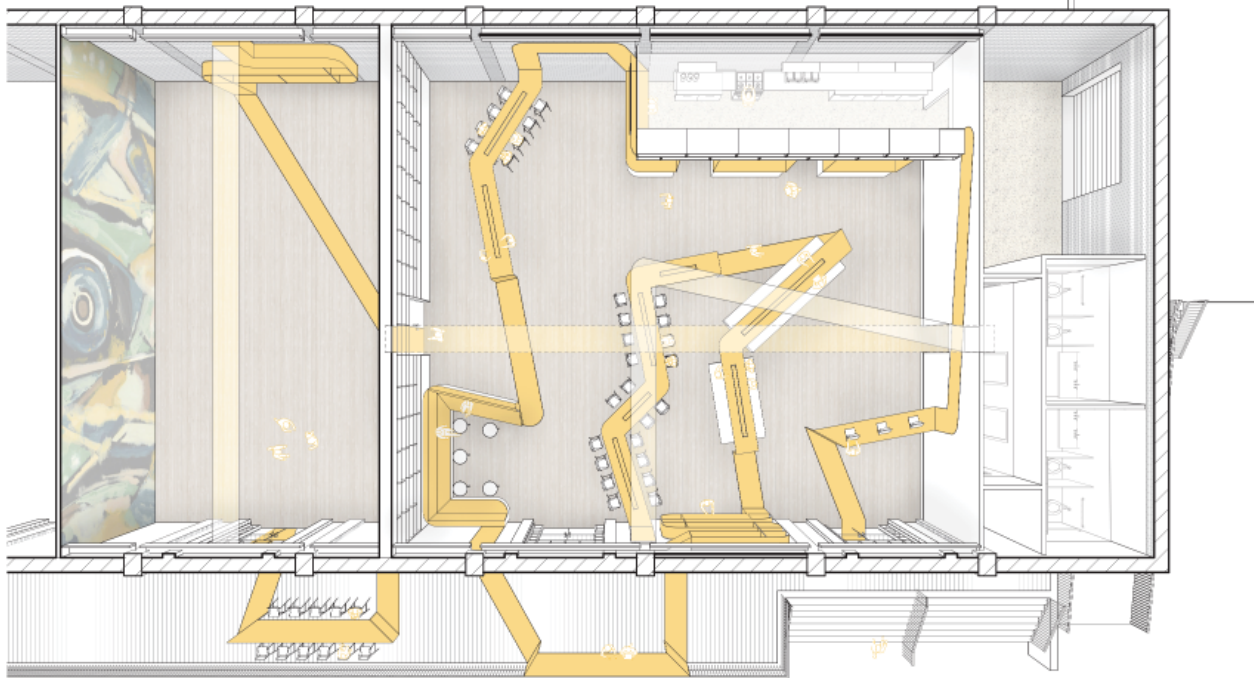
unifying program pieces

Just as there are many areas of Knoxville, there are also many areas of a cafe. In order to have unity between guests and staff, the spaces must also be unified. Spaces such as the dining room, service counter, and back-of-house areas all serve unique purposes that work together to create a flow of service. A ribbon structure ties together the programmatic elements of the cafe. All activity within the cafe occurs around, on top of, and underneath, the element. It is a loop the guests can trace around the space to see how they connect to other people spatially.



community engagement and ownership

Community involvement begins before the doors of *Provisions* even open. The metal ribbon element is created and installed by a local fabricator. The table bases are built by community volunteers interested in learning basic construction methods. Jackson Terminal is home to Heuristics Workshop, a local casework fabricator, and the woodworkers will hold build days where community members can get involved with the construction of the cafe, instilling a sense of ownership that will lead to patronage. The pendant lights will also be constructed on the build days from simple cords and tin cans.





exterior threshold

The front deck area serves as a threshold between the community of Knoxville and the interior of the cafe. In order to break down social barriers and create intrigue, the ribbon element occupies this exterior space as well. Here it serves as outdoor seating as well as produce stands where people can pick up home grown produce and canned goods for a quick snack or to use in a meal later on.



the meeting room

The Old City is in need of a multipurpose space that is accessible and welcoming to everyone in the community. The *Provisions Meeting Room* is a space for casual meetings with friends, coworkers, community organizations, book clubs, and more. The space can also be rented at a low cost for parties but is more conducive to impromptu casual meetings.

bibliography

Wheeler, William Bruce, and Michael J. McDonald.
Knoxville, Tennessee: A Mountain City in the New South.
2nd ed. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005.

image credits:

- [a] Image courtesy of Library of Congress, 1891.
- [b] Image courtesy of University of Texas Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, 1913.
- [c] Image courtesy of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People records (Library of Congress), 1919.
- [d] Image courtesy of the City of Knoxville.
- [e] Image courtesy of the Beck Cultural Exchange Center.
- [f] Image courtesy of Google Maps.
- [g] Image courtesy of Shawn Poynter, *Metro Pulse*.
- [h] Image courtesy of lakeloudongliving.com.
- [i] Image courtesy of Shawn Poynter, *Metro Pulse*.
- [j] Image courtesy of Shawn Poynter, *Metro Pulse*.
- [k] Image courtesy of Google Maps.
- [l] Image courtesy of Coleen O'Leary.
- [m] Image courtesy of Coleen O'Leary.
- [n] Image courtesy of Coleen O'Leary.
- [o] Image courtesy of HomeDepot.com.
- [p] Image courtesy of MMPHobby.com.